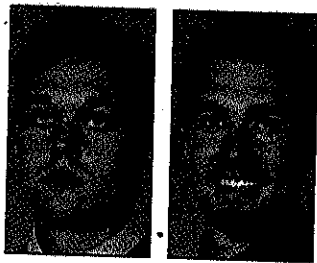


# A big year for MSU's big captains

By Shane Frederick  
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MANKATO — When Eriah Hayes and Tyler Elbrecht arrived at Minnesota State in the summer of 2009, they wondered if there was enough room for the two of them.



Eriah Hayes Tyler Elbrecht

Not on the MSU men's hockey team, but rather, in their Gage Center dorm room.

"I was in awe," Hayes said. "By how small (the room) was, and by how big (Elbrecht) was, especially knowing we'd have to live in there together for a full year."

Elbrecht thought the same thing.

The two 6-foot-4 freshmen — a couple of twin

Please see HOCKEY, Page D3

## On the Web

The WCHA released its 2013-14 conference schedule on Thursday. See Minnesota State's conference games for next year at [mankatofreepresshockey.blogspot.com](http://mankatofreepresshockey.blogspot.com).

# HOCKEY: A partnership as team captains

Continued from Page D1

towers inside MSU's twin towers — didn't know each other before being paired together as roommates.

Suddenly they were forced to cram into a cube, while the Mavericks' five other rookies enjoyed the suite life of the new Julia Sears building across campus.

"We were on the first floor, above the boiler room," Hayes said. "Every night, the pipes would go, 'Bang, bang, bang.'"

The two survived, though.

"We worked together during our freshman year to learn the ropes of college," Elbrecht said.

More than 3½ years later, Hayes and Elbrecht are finally enjoying the sweet life.

While they haven't lived together since that first year on campus, the seniors — Hayes a forward, Elbrecht a defenseman — remained joined together. As co-captains, they have led the

## "We're always looking out for the betterment of the team."

ERIAH HAYES

Mavericks' first winning team since the season before they arrived.

Going into the final weekend of the regular season, the two (along with the three other remaining members of that '09 rookie class: Evan Mosey, Eli Zuck and Phil Cook) are hoping to extend MSU's home schedule by one more week.

Playing a WCHA series against No. 5 North Dakota tonight and Saturday, the 10th-ranked Mavericks likely need two points — possibly more — to finish in the upper half of the conference and get home ice for the first round of the playoffs.

"It's the biggest weekend of the year for us," Hayes said. "We don't want these to be the last home games."

The Mavericks have

matched the program's Division I era high of winning 21 games and are tied for fourth in the WCHA standings, a long way from the back-to-back 11th-place finishes of the last two years.

First-year coach Mike Hastings has been a big reason for the turnaround, along with a talented group of second- and first-year players.

But ask around, and leadership — specifically the names Hayes and Elbrecht — often gets top billing.

"Right away, you could tell that both of those guys were leaders," freshman defenseman Jon Jutzi said. "They do things the right way. ... Everyone respects their work ethic."

Hastings said he was impressed by the team's overwhelming desire to have those two lead the team, and the captains haven't let anyone down.

"I respect them as hockey players and as men," Hastings said.

Perhaps it goes back to settling their roommate differences in cramped quarters, but both players say their captaincy is a true partnership.

"Obviously (Hastings) puts a lot of pressure on both of us," Elbrecht said. "But it's good pressure to have if we want to be successful. It helps being co-captains and sharing the responsibility."

Elbrecht was one of the Mavericks' captains last season, but this was the first year Hayes has worn the "C" on his jersey since he was a high school senior at La Crescent in 2006-07.

"We definitely couldn't do it without one another," said Hayes, who is MSU's nominee for WCHA Player of the Year. "Everything we do, we do together. We see things differently at times, but we find a happy medium. We talk it out. We never get in arguments."

"We're always looking out for the betterment of the team."

## College Hockey Gameday

### This weekend's series

7:37 p.m. today and 7:07 p.m. Saturday  
Verizon Wireless Center  
TV: Charter cable channels 226 and 826 (HD), Comcast channels 13 and 23 (Saturday only)  
Radio: KTOE 1420 AM, 102.7 FM  
Live blog: [mankatofreepresshockey.blogspot.com](http://mankatofreepresshockey.blogspot.com)  
Twitter: @puckato

## Minnesota State vs. North Dakota

The 10th-ranked Mavericks (21-10-3, 15-10-1 in WCHA) will close out the regular season against No. 5 UND (19-8-7, 13-6-7). Both teams remain in the hunt for the MacNaughton Cup. North Dakota has clinched a home-ice spot for next weekend's playoffs, but MSU has not. Minnesota State has lost the series' last nine games with its last win coming Oct. 17, 2008 at Mankato.

### The 5-hole

Five things to know about the matchup:

**1. Leiting the lamp:** Mavericks center Matt Leitner (15-25-40) is the highest-scoring sophomore in the nation. He is the sixth MSU player to score at least 40 points in a season in the WCHA era, a milestone reached just eight times since 1999-2000. Leitner, who leads the conference and is second in the country with 23 power-play points, has 10 points in his last five games.



Matt Leitner

**2. Injury report:** Senior Eli Zuck (lower body) remains out of the lineup this weekend, while freshman winger Dylan Margonari (9-8-17) will return after missing Saturday's game at Colorado College. Margonari ranks fourth on the team in goals and is second in points among MSU's freshmen, behind Teddy Blueger (5-13-18).

**3. Top of the line:** Leitner continues to center Johnny McInnis (13-9-22) and Chase Grant (6-10-16), while Blueger centers Eriah Hayes (18-13-31) and Margonari. On the blue line, sophomore defenseman Zach Palmquist (5-16-21) is the top scorer and is plus-12. Freshman goaltender Stephon Williams (.930, 1.82) has started 25 consecutive games.

**4. Late-season surge:** As usual, North Dakota has been coming on strong. It has lost just once in its last nine games, going 5-1-3, including a win and a tie at home against Bemidji State last weekend. North Dakota has not been swept this season, collecting at least one point in every league series. UND has played in nine overtime games.

**5. Scouting UND:** North Dakota seniors Danny Kristo (20-24-44) and Corban Knight (14-30-44) are two of the best forwards in the WCHA, and redshirt freshman Rocco Grimaldi (12-17-29) has been impressive. Alabama Huntsville transfer Clarke Saunders (.915, 2.30) has played most of the minutes in goal, although freshman Zane Gothberg (.914, 2.53) has been getting more time.



Dylan Margonari